**Restart & Recovery: Supporting High-Quality Instruction for English Learners in Onsite, Hybrid, and Remote Learning Environments**

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*This document compiles evidence-based resources and information for state education agencies (SEAs) to support English learner (EL) students and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. States can repurpose this document to meet their needs. If you repurpose this document, please use the following language:* ***"This resource draws on a resource created by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) that is based on guidance compiled from state education agencies, national organizations, and the U.S. Department of Education."***

State leaders play a critical role in [fostering access and equity for English learner (EL)](#) students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. State leaders can move their systems toward equity by defining evidence-based, high-quality instruction for EL students. They can make sure these definitions focus on language services and access to content and can be embedded in state guidance and integrated into professional learning opportunities to support implementation across onsite, hybrid, and remote learning environments.

Numerous studies and reports recommend evidence-based instructional practices that have been shown to support EL students' classroom engagement, language development, and academic achievement. These practices take EL students' home circumstances and language proficiency into account; afford EL students opportunities to engage in discipline-specific practices that leverage their home language(s), cultural assets, and prior knowledge; and leverage formative assessment practices to monitor the students' learning and support their autonomy.

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Evidence-based instructional practices for ELs, as synthesized in the 2017 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report, *[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English](#)*:
- leverage home language, knowledge, and cultural assets;
- integrate grade-level content, analytical practices, and language instruction;
- develop academic language and register during disciplinary instruction;
- provide explicit instruction in literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, and reading vocabulary in context) and language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing);
- use collaborative learning communities to support and extend teacher-led instruction;
- provide opportunities for academic discussion of text meaning and interpretation, including interaction with speakers who are proficient in the learner's second language;
- align language and content curricula and assessments; and

> - monitor progress using formative assessment practices that support student autonomy.

During the 2020-2021 school year, most EL students are no longer engaged in sustained, in-person schooling and are instead navigating a variety of learning environments, depending on COVID-19 safety guidelines. For educators, adapting these learning environments around evidence-based, high-quality instructional practices is critical. Districts and schools may face transitions between learning environments, requiring collaboration, innovation, and flexibility to ensure the provision of high-quality EL instruction. This paper offers recommendations for state leaders to support high-quality EL instruction in onsite, hybrid, and remote learning environments.

### *Challenges to High-Quality Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic has surfaced several challenges to offering high-quality EL instruction, including:

1. Some districts and schools have been more proactive than others in attending to EL students' learning needs across learning environments. In some locales, ELs may have inconsistent access to high-quality instruction due to limited access to devices, poor internet connectivity, or lack of appropriate materials and supports. For example, many language-learning programs used for remote learning are not aligned to English language development (ELD) or grade-level content standards.[1] Moreover, during remote learning, EL students may have fewer opportunities to engage in academic conversations that are important for content learning and language development.

2. Many teachers feel unprepared to engage EL students,[2] a trend that is exacerbated in remote learning contexts. Professional learning opportunities focused on supporting high-quality instruction for EL students during COVID-19 are limited; some districts and schools struggle to provide relevant, timely professional development on the appropriate use of technology to support language and content learning. Many states also face persistent shortages of EL-qualified teachers, which may further constrain ELs' access to high-quality instruction.

3. Families play a critical role as partners in education, but some EL families have limited access to linguistic, academic, and socioemotional resources in their preferred languages and preferred communication modalities.

The next section introduces strategies state leaders can use to support high-quality EL instruction. State leaders may consider embedding these strategies into guidance documents and professional learning opportunities and sharing the examples with local leaders and educators.

### *Strategies for Supporting High-Quality Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

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[1] Uro, G., Lai, D. & Alsace, T. (2020). *Supporting English learners in the COVID-19 crisis*. Council of the Great City Schools.

[2] Santibañez, L. & Gándara, P. (2016). The teachers our English language learners need. *Educational Leadership, 73*(5), 32-37.

Each of the strategies listed below contributes to the development of a statewide system that supports high-quality EL instruction. After summarizing the strategies, the authors provide additional explanation and examples, as well as professional learning scenarios and resources.

**Strategy 1. Set clear and ambitious expectations for EL instruction across all learning environments.** It is key for educators to understand what is required to engage ELs in grade-level curriculum. Expectations for EL instruction across learning environments should be guided by English language proficiency (ELP) and content standards; they also should promote engagement in the four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

**Strategy 2. Create structures for cross-departmental collaboration at the state and district levels that integrate ELs' needs into instructional planning.** When EL-focused leaders collaborate with their colleagues from content-specific departments as well as leaders from instructional technology and student support services, it promotes joint problem-solving and innovation. Such collaboration fosters the development of systems that support high-quality EL instruction.

**Strategy 3. Support districts and schools in monitoring implementation of evidence-based EL instructional practices.** To identify challenges and design additional supports, it is critical to develop tools for monitoring instruction across learning environments, as well as routines and structures for assessing English language proficiency and academic growth.

**Strategy 4. Engage families and communities as partners in the development of resources to support EL instruction.** Families and community leaders have a deep understanding of the challenges, concerns, and assets within the EL community, and their knowledge can inform the development of instructional resources for use across diverse learning environments.

**Strategy 5. Develop professional learning opportunities focused on increasing educators' capacities to promote high-quality EL instruction.** The implementation of evidence-based instructional practices for EL students across all learning environments requires new skills and expertise, necessitating the development of professional learning resources for teachers.

**Strategy 1. Set clear and ambitious expectations for EL instruction across all learning environments.**

It is key for educators to understand what is required to engage ELs in grade-level curriculum. Expectations for EL instruction across learning environments should be guided by ELP and content standards and also should promote engagement in the four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is important that educators design lessons that integrate evidence-based practices for English learners, such as leveraging ELs' cultural and linguistic assets, providing opportunities for academic discussions, and engaging in formative assessments.

**Examples**
State leaders may consider the following approaches to support districts and schools in setting clear and ambitious expectations for EL instruction:
- Facilitate collaborations with networks of instructional leaders from across the state to develop a set of evidence-based principles for high-quality EL instruction, along with expectations regarding their implementation across learning environments. Include these principles and expectations in relevant guidance documents and professional learning materials and disseminate these resources widely.
- Provide examples of asynchronous and synchronous strategies that support high-quality EL instruction. For example, state leaders can offer suggestions for facilitating academic discussions with EL students in remote learning:
  - *Synchronous:* Describe purposeful uses of breakout rooms during online learning, such as scaffolding discussions with talk moves and/or assigning participant roles.
  - *Asynchronous:* Describe purposeful uses of online tools (such as Google Docs) and video-/slide-creation platforms (such as Flipgrid, PowerPoint, etc.).
- Create dedicated web pages and/or webinars for disseminating instructional tools (e.g., unit- or lesson-planning guides, formative assessment rubrics) that foreground evidence-based practices for EL students.

**Scenario**
A state wants to issue additional guidance for EL instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Few guidance documents or professional learning resources currently address EL instruction, and where they do, the focus tends to be on compliance or remediation. Leaders are calling on staff in the EL department to supplement existing resources and specify needed support for EL students in remote and hybrid contexts.

*Questions:*
1. How can leaders ensure that the resources and guidance are grounded in current research on high-quality EL instruction?
2. How can leaders explain the evidence-based shifts in practice that are needed to support EL students' engagement across learning environments?
3. How can EL-focused leaders motivate others to consider EL students in their work?

**General Resources:**
- *[The Delaware Design for High Quality EL Education](#)* outlines a set of principles for EL instruction and defines expectations for all classrooms serving ELs. The document identifies academic planning priorities for teachers and describes targeted instructional supports to amplify language learning.

- *Arizona's Language Development Approach* articulates the evidence-based practices that state leaders expect to see in every classroom serving ELs.
- The California Department of Education has defined four evidence-based principles that support their vision for ELs and serve as the foundation for the state's *EL Roadmap*.
- The New York State Education Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages has a set of research-informed topic briefs for EL educators which can be used to deepen understanding of high-quality instructional practices.
- The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition has a series of practice briefs and podcasts that highlight promising practices related to science, mathematics, and early-childhood instruction for ELs.

**COVID-19 Specific Resources:**
- Delaware's 2020-2021 Classroom Ready Plan (see pp. 2-4) and Guidance for Reopening address principles of high-quality EL instruction as schools shift to in-person instruction during COVID-19.
- The California Department of Education has developed a series of webinars that offer guidance for EL instruction during COVID-19, including one webinar focused on English language development and another focused on dual-language programs.
- The Oakland Unified School District has developed guidance for EL instruction during remote learning that aligns with their overarching principles. Additionally, the district's English Language Learner and Multilingual Achievement (ELLMA) office produced a video describing how teachers can support student talk during remote learning; it also encourages teachers to use this language growth rubric to formatively assess EL students' written work.
- WestEd has published a brief titled, *Supporting English Learners During School Closures Considerations for Designing Distance Learning Experiences*. It explains four evidence-based EL instructional practices and provides illustrative examples of these practices in different learning environments.
- Fostering Quality Schools has published an article, *Responding to Education for Multilingual Learners After COVID-19 & Beyond: The Opportunity for Integrated Instruction with Targeted Support*, presenting the benefits and limitations of different remote learning approaches for EL students.

**Strategy 2. Create structures for cross-departmental collaboration at the state and district levels that integrate ELs' needs into instructional planning.**

When EL-focused leaders collaborate with colleagues from content-specific departments as well as leaders from instructional technology and student support services, it fosters joint problem-solving and innovation focused on developing systems that support high-quality EL instruction. To overcome the isolation of leaders who traditionally work on their own, it is important to organize and facilitate sustainable routines for planning and reflection focused on EL instruction. In school systems that are observing growth in EL achievement, EL students' needs are central to instructional planning efforts, and their leaders are using virtual meeting platforms to continue fostering shared responsibility for EL instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Examples**
State leaders may consider the following approaches to create structures for cross-departmental collaboration:
- Establish cross-departmental instructional planning committees that include specialists in EL education, content, assessment, technology, and student services, and designate time in daily or weekly schedules for these committees to collaborate. Monitor planning committees to be sure that EL specialists are included in strategic planning, content-area curriculum development, COVID-19 guidance development, and research and evaluation activities.
- Collect and disseminate descriptions of cross-departmental structures that districts have in place to support collaboration between leaders and teachers across departments. For example, in some districts, centralized EL specialists are working alongside content-specific instructional coaches and general education teachers to design and implement remote learning lessons for ELs.
- Develop protocols that offer structured processes to support productive cross-departmental conversations that foster shared responsibility for high-quality EL instruction.
- Design professional learning sessions for district and school leaders that include strategies for facilitating cross-departmental collaboration focused on attending to ELs' needs across learning environments.

**Scenario**
Each department in a SEA tends to work independently. Departments often are protective of their projects and initiatives, and different departments generally remain within their specific responsibility area. EL-focused leaders feel that a cross-department leadership team would facilitate development of a continuous-improvement plan for serving EL students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Questions:*
1. How can EL-focused leaders motivate leaders from diverse departments (e.g. content-specific departments, instructional technology, student support services) to participate on a cross-department instructional planning team?
2. How can leaders build upon existing structures or routines to support shared responsibility for high-quality EL instruction?
3. What protocols and resources would be helpful in facilitating cross-departmental conversations?

**Resources:**
- WIDA's Focus Bulletin fosters collaboration and shared responsibility with a focus on EL instruction.

- Honigsfeld and Dove's (2019) book, *Collaborating for English Learners: A Foundation Guide to Integrated Practices*, includes examples of how to include diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes; it also outlines leaders' roles in fostering collaborative practices that support high-quality EL instruction.

**Strategy 3. Support districts and schools in monitoring implementation of evidence-based EL instructional practices.**

In identifying challenges and designing additional supports, it is critical to (a) develop tools for monitoring instruction across learning environments and (b) establish routines and structures for assessing English language proficiency and academic growth. It also will be important to examine the long-term impact of COVID-related interruptions in schooling to identify and address gaps in EL students' learning.

**Examples**
State leaders may consider the following approaches to support districts and schools in monitoring implementation:
- Create or modify tools (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, observation protocols) to assess implementation of evidence-based practices for EL students across learning environments, and share them with district and school leaders. For example, observation protocols or walk-through rubrics could be revised as tools to capture evidence of effective practice in a remote learning context.
- Partner with relevant stakeholders (such as professional organizations, regional or county offices, and education cooperatives) to develop opportunities for district and school leaders to build capacity in monitoring implementation of high-quality EL instruction.
- Support LEAs in developing dashboards (or using existing analysis tools) that allow for the disaggregation of attendance, English language proficiency, and academic assessment data by grade level, proficiency level, race/ethnicity, newcomers, long-term ELs, former ELs, years in US schools, schooling in the primary language, learning interruptions, disabilities, socioeconomic status, etc. Compare results across districts and schools, noting which have used in-person, hybrid, and remote learning, and for how long.
- Provide opportunities for LEAs to share strategies for and updates on monitoring efforts.

**Scenario**
Before the pandemic, the district had been engaged in quarterly classroom walk-throughs to observe the implementation of new instructional materials that support principles of high-quality EL instruction. The walk-throughs provided them with insights related to the types of professional development and curricular modifications that might be needed to facilitate additional shifts in teachers' practices. District leaders are hoping to design new processes to engage in walk-throughs in hybrid and remote learning environments.

*Questions:*
1. Which partners might district leaders engage to help them modify classroom walk-throughs for remote and hybrid learning contexts?
2. What data would district leaders need to gather and/or analyze to help them understand how EL students are faring in remote and hybrid learning environments, as well as what kind of supports teachers need to be effective in these contexts?

**Resources:**
- The New Teacher Project has posted a set of survey questions designed to help district leaders understand educators' needs during COVID-19, which can be modified to focus on EL instructional challenges and supports.

- To review school site practices, the Oakland Unified School District has adapted their English language learner review process for remote learning by modifying their existing [improvement tools](#) around a set [focal indicators](#).
- [Fostering Quality Schools](#), in collaboration with District 2 Manhattan, District 15 Brooklyn, and the Brooklyn North Borough Office of the New York City Department of Education, has published a [brief](#) on their monitoring processes as schools return to in-person instruction.
- Understanding Language at Stanford University offers [two webinars](#) on formative assessment practices with ELs in remote learning. The second session in particular describes several formative assessment tools for use during remote learning, such as the [ELA Argumentation Analysis Tool](#), [Math Reasoning and Argumentation Analysis Tool](#), and [Garden Grove USD Math Discourse Tool](#).

**Strategy 4. Engage families and communities as partners in the development of resources to support EL instruction.**

Families and community leaders have a deep understanding of the challenges, concerns, and assets within the EL community and can inform the development of instructional resources for use across diverse learning environments. Navigating transitions among remote, hybrid, and onsite learning environments will require developing new resources for families as they share the responsibility for supporting ELs.

**Examples**
State leaders may consider the following approaches to engaging families and communities as partners:
- Engage families and community leaders in the development of resources (e.g., remote learning plans, attendance policies, etc.) in their preferred languages.
- Encourage LEAs to regularly survey EL families to learn which linguistic, academic, and socioemotional supports they need in each learning environment.
- Encourage LEAs to establish partnerships with community- and faith-based organizations to support high-quality EL instruction by communicating expectations for attendance and engagement, establishing support centers, networking families, and strengthening parent leadership.
- Recommend allocating fiscal resources to support family liaisons who can sustain two-way communication with families.

**Scenario**
EL families have expressed their concerns to the district about the lack of clear guidance in languages they can understand regarding their children's education during distance learning. Some families have been attending their children's synchronous class sessions in the hope of understanding what is expected. Teachers have raised the class time spent supporting EL families during instructional time for all students.

*Questions:*
1. What could the district do to better understand EL families' needs during hybrid and remote learning?
2. How could the district develop remote learning guidance in partnership with EL families?
3. How could the district use community resources to strengthen communication with EL families?

**Resources:**
- The [Massachusetts Department of Education](#) has posted remote learning guidance for families of English learners in multiple languages.
- Sacramento Unified School District has set up a [distance learning site for parents](#) with tutorials and access to translation in multiple languages.
- The Oakland Unified School District has launched [Family Central,](#) a website with tutorial videos to help families learn how to use virtual classroom tools and access wrap-around supports (e.g., internet, food, health). There is also a hotline that connects families with speakers of their preferred language.

- The Office of English Language Acquisition has posted a podcast, *Engaging English Learners and Families through Distance Learning,* that shares district strategies for engaging EL families.
- The Region 13 Comprehensive Center at WestEd, in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department, has developed a webinar focused on building relationships with EL students and families in remote and hybrid learning environments.

**Strategy 5. Develop professional learning opportunities focused on increasing educators' capacities to promote high-quality EL instruction.**

The implementation of evidence-based instructional practices for EL students across all learning environments requires new skills and expertise, necessitating the development of professional learning resources for teachers. In addition to learning how to design lessons around evidence-based practices for EL students, educators may benefit from learning how to use digital tools that facilitate high-quality EL instruction across learning environments.

**Examples**
State leaders may consider the following approaches to developing professional learning opportunities focused on increasing educators' capacities:
- Facilitate collaboration among state and district leaders across multiple departments (e.g., EL, content, special education), regional service centers, and partners from institutions of higher education to develop or revise professional learning opportunities that focus on implementing evidence-based practices for EL instruction across learning environments.
- Allocate Title II or Title III funding to incentivize teachers to participate in virtual professional learning opportunities focused on supporting high-quality EL instruction in remote and hybrid learning environments.
- Encourage LEAs to design professional learning resources focused on high-quality EL instruction, such as model units and lesson plans that articulate goals for language and content development and outline strategies for engaging EL students in academic discussions.

**Scenario**
The state recently adopted a framework that articulates a set of principles for EL instruction to be implemented in any of the state's approved program models (i.e., ESL, bilingual, dual language, newcomer). The state's EL population continues to grow, and there is a shortage of EL-endorsed teachers in the state. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic caused all schools to shift to virtual instruction, additional Title II funding was allocated to support EL-focused professional learning.

*Questions:*
1. How can the state develop professional learning opportunities to support the state's new framework across learning environments?
2. Which partners could the state engage in helping to design and deliver the professional learning?
3. How could the state allocate funds to give teachers from across the state adequate opportunities to participate in EL-focused professional learning?

**Resources:**
- The U.S. Department of Education has released a report, *Supporting English Learners through Technology: What Districts and Teachers Say about Digital Learning Resources for English Learners*, on:
    - how districts and teachers have identified digital learning resources (DLRs);
    - how teachers have used DLRs;
    - supports for and barriers to DLR use; and
    - suggestions for improving the usefulness of DLRs in EL instruction.

    In addition, the resource *Educator and Developer Toolkits on Using Digital Learning Resources to Support English Learners* supports educators in using technology to

facilitate language and academic development and offers guidance on designing educational technology with EL students in mind.

- Sponsored by the Region 13 Comprehensive Center at WestEd, in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department, this webinar series for educators includes strategies for lesson planning and integrating language development into content instruction.
- Sponsored by the Region 15 Comprehensive Center at WestEd in collaboration with the California Teachers Association and California Department of Education, this archived webinar series describes how educators can support multilingual and EL students in remote learning.
- The English Learners Success Forum has a wealth of resources related to high-quality instructional materials for ELs and has outlined specific recommendations for ELs in remote learning.